

Start

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/6856150) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/6856150>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Naruto
Relationship:	Gaara/Rock Lee
Character:	Gaara (Naruto) , Rock Lee , Original Characters
Language:	English
Collections:	LeeGaa/GaaLee , Lee&GaaraFics
Stats:	Published: 2016-05-15 Words: 8,538 Chapters: 1/1

Start

by [BaffledFox](#)

Summary

Gaara is trying to court Lee.

Lee is mostly oblivious.

Eventually they come to an understanding.

(Mild plot, mostly fluff, just a long drabble)

Notes

I have never written either of these characters before, so please be gentle, haha.

I fell head over heels for this pair and have been saddened to see there isn't much in terms of fanfics or art for them. I am no artist! So! I feel the need to flood the fandom with fics. Hopefully my writing is decent, and I can only improve as I get to know these characters better.

Please enjoy the fic and feel free to tell me what you think of it. Comments are my life blood and will keep me writing.

Gaara was acting strange.

Well, stranger than usual. The normal 'strange' that Gaara was, Lee had gotten used to (or he thought he had). But, this, this was entirely different and it was making him question exactly what

he knew about the Kazekage.

Gaara had gotten into the habit of staring at him lately, even just passing by through the hall, or when they were training, or even when they got lunch together. It wasn't his usual pinpoint stare, it was something a mile wide and just there, like another person between them.

The Kazekage had also gotten into the habit of touching him. Innocent as it was, it was something that was entirely unexpected from the usual closed off Gaara. When they discussed missions, or reports, or anything that involved both their villages Gaara tended to be closer than before, he'd brush against him, or sometimes would lay his hand on his shoulder, or even lean close next to him when they surveyed maps.

Gaara being that close gave Lee an intimate picture of him; he now knew the Kazekage smelled like dust and sunshine; something musky, like a static charge right before it rained, or maybe the desert just after a sandstorm. He also knew his red-hair was rough where it would brush his jaw, noticed his mouth was actually an enticing shape, his lips the color of sandstone. When the sunlight would peek in through the port windows of the Kazekage's office it would reflect in his blue-green eyes and reminded Lee of sea glass.

When Gaara got so close, sometimes Lee forgot to breathe, or even forgot what he had been saying(but his own reactions could be analyzed later, right now he was focusing on Gaara).

There was also the sparring.

Gaara had been Lee's only flesh and blood opponent since he was stationed in Suna, but lately their matches had taken a distinct turn.

Lee wouldn't normally look further into that at all, but there was something about it that was different than their previous matches(before all this happened). Before, Lee would just try and get in close enough to land a blow, he'd have a hell of a time with the sand barrier as expected, but mostly Gaara would just dodge or deflect. It was amazing training for himself, to get faster and test his reflexes, but then that changed too.

Gaara still used his defense, and still dodged and deflected, but it was different. He wouldn't give himself the space Lee was used to. When Lee got in close Gaara would circle him instead, they pushed and pull at each other's limits, swinging around close together in the training field. It felt more like a dance, their bodies suddenly in synch, the wave of sand glittering around him as he threw a fist or kick at Gaara which the Kazekage would sidestep(yet still somehow able to crowd his space).

It had thrown Lee off balance; he had gotten slower in those moments, he had been transfixed by Gaara's balance and grace, the sun bouncing off the sand shone like glass, sparkling in the heat around them. It felt like he had been accepted into the eye of the storm, it felt intimate in a way it never had before, and Lee had been able to see Gaara close up; the wrinkle to his brow as he concentrated, could see the corded muscles in his arms as he waved his hands this way and that to direct the sand, had seen the flash of creamy skin when his shirt would ride up or his collar would dip low.

It was tantalizing, and it caused Lee to feel different.

What it meant, he didn't know. Surely he was just mesmerized by a worthy opponent, observing like that was normal, wasn't it? Keeping a close eye on the enemy was hardly something that Lee should question.

He had written a letter to Gai about it, but mostly his sensei had just rattled on about the passion of youth and didn't really answer his question. Or, maybe he had, Lee would need to read the letter again(for the fiftieth time) to be sure he wasn't missing any wisdom.

Then, there were the gifts.

Lee was sitting in his chair at his desk, leaning back so he could survey the items atop it. The usual ink stones and brushes were off to the right, paperwork he had been working on scattered in the center, and a stack of unchecked documents on the left. But, that wasn't important, what was important were the ten small cactuses arranged on the edge of his desk. Varying types, varying heights and widths all in small colorful pots. The one in the center had a large pink blossom(this was Lee's favorite, if he were to admit).

For ten straight days now Gaara had sent a cactus, the plants delivered by Lee's personal assistant Satsu and it left him even more puzzled than before.

At first he figured it was Gaara giving him more responsibility. He had taken these plants and vigorously tended to them, making sure they had the best soil and just enough water. He wouldn't let any of them die! He could not disappoint Konoha or the Kazekage! Lee had even provided status reports to Gaara, though he never heard back on the subject, and thus made him wonder if he was taking these gifts the right way.

What else could they represent, other than hard work? Well, maybe it was to give him appreciation of the climate. To show him how difficult it was for something to survive here. It could be a metaphor for him to persevere like these cactuses, maybe Gaara had caught on to his bout of homesickness.

Lee didn't think it was that either, though. Gaara was a kinder person than he had been when he first met him at the Chuunin exams, but he was still Gaara of the desert and Lee didn't think he was able to be so acutely observant to Lee's subtle change of mood. Social situations were still difficult for the Kazekage(luckily he had Temari to guide him in political settings), and the full human emotional spectrum was something that was mostly grey to him.

If it wasn't to teach responsibility, hard work, or perseverance, then what were they for?

He had approached Temari about it after the sixth cactus but she hadn't been much help. She merely said Gaara didn't give 'gifts' and dropped the subject much to Lee's dismay. She also suggested he go to the Kazekage directly if it was still bothering him, but Lee couldn't do that! It would be rude to ask him outright what this meant, it was clear Gaara felt he had a certain level of intelligence to figure out this puzzle on his own. He would not let the Kazekage down!

Tap. Tap. Tap.

"Come in!" Lee called to the rapping on the door, leaning forward, all four chair legs snapping onto the floor just as the door to his office opened.

Satsu entered, the bronze of her skin standing out against the eggshell blue of the linen dress she wore. "Lee-san." She dipped her head in greeting, her white-blonde hair was held up on one side with a onyx clip.

"Satsu-san." Lee smiled at the willowy woman, she had been his assistant for the past eight months since he'd been in Suna. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Satsu approached the desk, her flat grey eyes glancing at the cactuses(which she had brought

personally over the course of days) before she brought her attention back to Lee's warm expression. She took the small slip of paper from the hidden pocket in her billowy sleeve and held it out for him between two fingers, "This is from the Kazekage-sama."

Lee blinked, looking down at the paper as if it was another clue. Gaara hadn't sent him notes or scrolls or anything of the like before, not on a personal level, and Gaara wouldn't send anything compromising with his assistant. Maybe it was finally his answer to Lee's progress reports on the plants?

"Lee-san?" His hesitation was noticed, Satsu's arm still extended.

"T-thank you, Satsu-san." He said automatically, taking the note from her; Satsu was about to turn to leave before Lee quickly spoke, "Could I ask you something?"

She turned minutely back to the desk, her body still pivoted towards the door. "You can ask me anything you want, Lee-san. I am your personal assistant and guide while you are stationed in Sunagakure."

Her tone had been clipped and professional, as Lee expected, but it made him rub the back of his head in nervous anticipation. "Do you know what this means?"

"You'll have to be more specific," She said, crossing her arms over her chest, the rustle of linen a loud whisper in the quiet of Lee's office.

"I mean," Lee flushed, gesturing at the cactuses on his desk, "I've been trying to figure out what they mean, but maybe I need a perspective of someone who lives here. What would they represent? What would it mean to Gaa--the Kazekage-sama to send them to me?"

"I can't speak for the Kazekage-sama," Satsu started unhelpfully, "But, these cactuses were chosen with care. He did not give this duty to his assistant or Temari-sama or Kankuro-sama. He picked these out himself, and potted them himself. He took time away from his schedule to do this."

Lee stared hard at the middle cactus, the one with the flower so big it seemed to dwarf the stubby plant.

"These are gifts," Satsu said, gesturing at the cactuses, "They represent our home, they also represent his time and attention towards you. Your village is an important ally, and you are an important envoy."

"Peace offerings?" Lee said, looking up at the stone-faced woman.

"We are already allies, he hardly needs to create more peace between us."

"Then...."

She eyed Lee, the leaf shinobi seemed to struggle with digesting the information she had given him. "He also gave you that note." She said, hoping that maybe that would shed more light on whatever it was Lee hoped to find here.

Lee still had the paper in his hand, unsure if he should read it now or later. He chewed the inside of his cheek, feeling completely out of place. Normally Gaara was so straightforward to the point of being rude; he didn't bother with pleasantries and he didn't really consider anyone's feelings before he spoke. The Kazekage was rather blunt, but Lee didn't mind it. Now, it seemed Gaara had figured out how to be cryptic and Lee was wishing for the old Gaara back, the one who would have just told him to his face what all this was supposed to mean. "Has he done this before?"

“Given gifts?” Satsu rolled her shoulder in an indifferent gesture, “I have only been an employee of the tower for a few years. In that time I have not noticed the Kazekage-sama giving gifts.” She decided to add, “That doesn’t mean he didn’t, but I was just not aware of it, if he did.”

The admission wasn’t really helpful, though Temari had already told him that Gaara didn’t dote randomly(or at all), so he supposed he already had his answer and it had been redundant to ask. His bandaged fingers finally decided to smooth out the note, his dark eyes flicking over the simple precise characters written in a neat script:

‘I often watch you.’

Lee blinked, almost choking on a breath at the note, turning it this way and that as if there would be another way to interpret the characters on the thin piece of parchment. What the hell was that supposed to mean?! Was Gaara suspicious of something? Had he done anything strange in the past days that would prompt his attention?

Satsu cleared her throat, “Lee-san, if there’s nothing else...”

“Ah,” He looked up slamming his hand on the desk, hiding the strange note under his flattened palm. Satsu was giving him an odd look(one he hadn’t gotten since he had first met her, she had sort of grown used to his behavior and outbursts by now for the most part), “I didn’t mean to keep you Satsu-san,” He spoke quickly, “I just haven’t been able to figure this out, and I was hoping...” He frowned but hastily finished, “Thank you.”

Satsu paused, knowing she should retreat now and leave Lee alone; but she didn’t like the new expression on Lee’s face. He seemed resigned almost, not as full of energy as usual, and it was clear this was bothering him. He was taking the Kazekage’s interest badly, thinking it was either a test or perhaps a reprimand of some kind. She sighed before she spoke, knowing she would regret getting involved, “Lee-san, if I can speak frankly...”

Lee immediately perked to attention, his eyes bright with renewed energy, “Of course, Satsu-san!”

“If the Kazekage-sama wasn’t the one sending you these gifts, giving you more attention, or sending notes, then how would you interpret these gestures?”

He brought his hand to his chin in a clear thinking pose, his brow furrowed; not catching on as quickly as she hoped.

She decided to cut in, “Has there been anyone in your life that you wanted to get to know better? That you wanted to be involved with?” For the sake of not being misunderstood she hastily added, “Romantically?”

“R-romantically?” Lee blinked, the only image coming to mind was a younger version of Sakura. However, they hadn’t been as close as the years wore on(were they even close to begin with?), and her career had left her isolated just as his new position left him estranged from the leaf. He hadn’t caught up with her in some time, only noticing her in passing, hearing bits and pieces from Naruto about her life. If he was honest, he hadn’t thought about her romantically in a long time, all that existed now was a shallow friendship that he never got the chance to deepen. He scratched at the side of his face, nervously glancing away from her, “Not recently.”

Satsu continued, “So you can understand how this should be interpreted then?”

Lee only just seemed to catch on, he balked at her, his face flushed, “Gaara?!” It wasn’t a question, more an incredulous statement somehow punctuated just by the name of the Kazekage, completely

forgetting polite protocol and not bothering to call Gaara by his title. “You think he, that h-he, you think--” He sputtered.

“If it wasn’t the Kazekage-sama,” She said, “I think it would be pretty obvious.”

Obvious? Lee wasn’t sure what to think or what to say, more denials on the tip of his tongue but his assistant merely held up a hand as if to ward his outburst(which he was sure to have).

“But, we are talking about the Kazekage-sama, so I could be completely wrong. Regardless, I think you just need to confront him yourself and get answers. However,” She eyed Lee seriously, “If he is trying to pursue something romantic with you, you better know how to let him down easy, you got it?” She usually wasn’t so sharp with him, but this was important, Gaara was still volatile and fluctuating moods could cause collateral damage. He had gotten better, yes, but no one had seen Gaara in love(if he was even capable) and Satsu was assuming it wouldn’t be pretty if he got his heart broken. It wasn’t a secret that the Kazekage-sama preferred Lee’s company, he had asked for him specifically for this position, and since he had spent every moment of free time(which wasn’t much) being around Lee. He also had started doing this, gift giving, and had even been so bold as to send a personal note. This was getting deep, and she couldn’t afford Lee to offend her leader, even accidentally; there could be lives at stake if he did.

“Confront him? Let him down easy?” Lee’s thoughts were running faster than he ever could, he was becoming overwhelmed; his heart was beating hard in his chest, so many emotions shooting through him that he didn’t know which one to grab first. This was crazy! Gaara was not in love with him! No way! “Satsu-san, I don’t think...”

“I don’t either.” She said quickly, “But, in case, you need to ask him about this. It’s obviously bothering you, and the Kazekage-sama can’t afford any distractions if that is all this is.”

Right. Satsu wasn’t so concerned about him, merely concerned for the Kazekage and how Lee was affecting him(supposedly). Lee couldn’t be selfish and pretend nothing was going on, something clearly was, and it was his duty to get to the bottom of it, to restore normalcy back to Sunagakure. He was closest to Gaara(sans his siblings) so it seemed a no-brainer that he would be the one to have this conversation with him(even if he was the subject of it). “I understand.” Lee said stiffly, nodding his head at Satsu.

His assistant hesitated a moment, her eyes passing over him before she seemed satisfied with what she saw in his resolved expression. “Good.” She looked over at the door but hadn’t yet tried to leave, “Now might be the best time to approach him.”

“Now?!” Lee was definitely going to confront Gaara, but he had expected a little more time to prepare! What was he even supposed to say?

She ignored his look of panic, “He doesn’t have any more appointments today. He’ll most likely be in his office well into the night. There is no better time than now.”

“Yeah, but--”

“He also just gave me that note. He’s thinking about you.” Satsu countered, “Come one, Lee-san, I’ll walk with you.”

Somehow that was hardly comforting; maybe it was the serious expression on her face, or the way her grey eyes looked like two pieces of stone, but he felt he couldn’t disobey(and he wasn’t one to back down from a challenge or a fight). He inhaled a deep breath, bolstering his resolve as he got up from his chair and stiffly walked around the desk to Satsu’s side. “Okay.” He had said with a

firm nod.

Satsu took the lead, stepping across the space and opening the door, she stepped out into the hallway with a nervous Lee keeping pace next to her as they made their way towards the Kazekage's office.

Lee didn't have much of a reprieve, it somehow had taken no time at all to reach Gaara's room(or maybe it was because he had been so lost in thought). The two guards standing outside of it nodded to Satsu and Lee whom had politely bowed their heads in return. "I'll be nearby if you need anything." She said to Lee, her tone was flat with her usual professionalism.

He glanced over to her as she began to retreat, the rustle of her linen dress heard even as she rounded the corner and disappeared from his sight. Well, it was now or never. Lee lifted a hand and knocked hard on the door.

"Enter." Gaara intoned almost immediately from the other side.

Lee swallowed down his jitters and opened the door to the office and immediately shut(slammed) it behind him, his back braced against it as if he expected Gaara to attack him the moment he entered(which was absurd).

It was safe to say Gaara immediately noticed Lee's strange behavior; the Kazekage seated at the desk on the opposite side of Lee had lifted his gaze to him, his expression unreadable as usual(though there was a slight incline of his brow that caused the dark circle around his right eye to stretch). "Lee." It wasn't a question or a statement really, just a recital of the other shinobi's name as if he hadn't really expected him(of course he would have, Gaara would have sensed his approach and would have known he was loitering outside his door for however long he had).

He bravely pushed off the door and approached the seated Kazekage, the light from the port windows blinding as it filtered in, winking off the ceremonial weapons that were pinned on Gaara's walls. "Can I talk to you?"

The kanji on Gaara's forehead wrinkled quizzically, he had also noticed when Lee glanced to the gourd that was leaning innocently against the side of his desk as if it were a living thing he needed to avoid. Gaara could smell fear, but Lee didn't seem to be afraid, just nervous, or acting weird(which wasn't so unusual for him). The Kazekage felt he knew what Lee had came here to discuss. It had taken longer for Lee to approach him about it than he initially had thought, a reason why recently he had tried to bombard the other shinobi into a reaction. "Do you accept?"

Lee had stopped a few feet from Gaara's desk, his arms stiffly at his side, his lips pulled down into a concentrated frown. "Accept?"

Gaara had set down the ink brush that had been in his hand, his blue-green eyes pinning Lee to the spot. "So you refuse?"

He cocked his head to the side, trying to appear serious and collected but the persona was failing him, he was just so damn confused. "I don't understand." He said lamely.

"I sent a letter to your clan asking permission," Gaara said, and Lee's confused expression hadn't changed(if anything there should be comical question marks popping up around him for everything the Kazekage was saying), "They informed me that you were an orphan, cared for by a sub branch which has no power over your affairs."

"My clan? But, I haven't even spoken to them since," Once Lee had been accepted into the

academy his clan had a hands off approach for guiding the uninteresting child. It wasn't until Gai had taken him under his wing had Lee really flourished or grown. He thought of his sensei as his surrogate father and had hoped perhaps Gai felt the same about him. When he graduated the academy he had been a legal adult, and being estranged as he was from his clan, they didn't have any ability to influence him(not that they had ever tried before). "Permission for what?" He had decided to ask, cutting his thoughts off mid-sentence.

"To court you."

That admission seemed to vibrate around them, bouncing off the walls, the syllables it took to make the words almost like real things, each one stabbing Lee and made him gape wide-eyed at the Kazekage. Satsu was correct? This was truly, this was--

"Lee?"

"So you, I mean, what you've been doing, I mean--" Lee clutched his chest dramatically, his heart beating so hard it was sure to explode right from his chest. Lee couldn't continue whatever it was he was trying to say, he could barely even breathe.

Gaara had stood up, his green eyes focused completely on the leaf nin, his palms planted on his desk as if he were debating with getting close to Lee to help or staying at a distance to not make things worse. He understood Lee's over the top reaction to be bad, that this was bad, that perhaps Lee didn't want him as a suitor and this had been a foolish thing to pursue. But, Naruto had told him that anything could be possible if he just tried, and Gaara had blindly believed that. He was making tons of strides since he had met the blond and the thought of finally having a person that valued his existence on a personal level was what drove him to pursue Lee. "Lee?" He questioned, the smallest ounce of concern in his tone(or maybe Lee was just imagining that).

Lee's eyes bounced from here to there, trying not to land on Gaara, but now suddenly noticing the strange reading material towered on the left side of his desk. The books were thick, definitely old, and the writing on the spines was faded but he could just make out 'courting rituals', 'marriage', 'family', 'romance through the ages' to name a few. There was seriously a theme there and it caused Lee's face to turn bright red. "You've been studying this?"

"I don't have any personal experience." Gaara said very matter-of-factly with his usual cool tone, having approached this whole affair as he would a mission or an important political ally.

He had gravitated towards the desk so he could better view the cover of one of the books. It looked ancient, especially up close. "Why?" He finally asked, unable to stop himself, his black eyes focused on Gaara's face.

It seemed to take a moment for Gaara to process the question, or perhaps think of a valid response. "I wanted you to accept me," He spoke fluidly, "I feel that you are my special person." The phrase he repeated was a notion Naruto had told him about in the past, when they had a long talk about the future and everything that could be before them.

It felt like Gaara should say more, at least, Lee was hoping he would say more because it felt like his admission was unfinished and left a lot to the imagination. Everything felt a little sudden and suffocating and he didn't know how he should feel about it. He definitely needed more time to process, this was a bad idea barging in here without a real plan. A shinobi never launched himself into battle without thinking of strategies! He felt completely out of his depth.

Lee grabbed the collar of his jumpsuit, tugging on it, suddenly overheated and still very much overwhelmed. What was he supposed to say? Despite Gaara's emotionless tone and the flat of his

eyes, it seemed like a startlingly emotional statement. “But, I’m, I’m...” With his free hand he gestured at himself, encompassing his whole body because he knew what he looked like, and what he was. He was definitely a lot of things, a competent warrior for one, a loyal friend, determined to a fault, and kind. But, he wasn’t attractive, his body was a mess of knots and scar tissue, he had oddly long limbs and he was a little too tall, his eyes were a strange shape, his face too round; he just wasn’t a love interest, and he had accepted that. Years of isolation, put downs, and rejection could do that to a person; well, Gaara knew all about that, didn’t he? “I don’t....”

Gaara had folded his arms over his chest, his posture relaxed though the hardness of his expression belied the calm he was trying to exude. “Did I do something incorrect?” He finally asked, able to admit to himself that the books he had used were grossly outdated, the courtship rituals had to have changed from then to now, though he hadn’t asked anyone else about it. Naruto didn’t have much advice on the intimate side of things either, and a lot of his plans had ended in ramen. “Or do you reject me?”

It was more complicated than that!

Lee didn’t know what to even focus on first, what to say. It wasn’t that simple, right? It wasn’t about a yes or a no, because what was Gaara even asking for? To date him? It seemed he had jumped right over ‘dating’ and landed into some sort of proposition, why else send the gifts and contact his clan? His mind was reeling but he knew he had to get a handle on the situation, he needed to calm down, and he needed to reassure Gaara. He shook his head, launching the bad feelings right out of it, his body poised, his fists clenched and the usual determined fire in his eyes. “You didn’t do anything wrong,” He said quickly, “I just didn’t know what you were doing or why you were doing it, so I didn’t know how I was supposed to respond. I can’t reject you because I...I...” His speech halted and he flushed darkly, “I don’t know how I feel, so I...”

“You enjoy my company,” It wasn’t a question, “You relax when I touch you. You drop your guard when I invade your personal space. You worry for me when I go on missions without you. You always seek me out to share lunch together. You follow me when I go out into the desert. You don’t act the same around me like you do with other people.” Gaara’s words were soft but poignant, hovering in the air between them.

Lee’s eyes had widened as he stared at the Kazekage; was he really that transparent? Or, was Gaara just that observant? How did he perceive all that when Lee was so unaware of doing it? He knew he felt different around Gaara, he had felt that for a while, but had never pondered long about it (he would actually impose training regimes on himself to avoid thinking about it altogether).

“Am I wrong?”

“No,” He said, still feeling amped up and jittery, even with the desk between them it felt like Gaara was too close, his eyes boring into his face (though Lee was still not looking directly at him). “No, but, it’s more complicated than that.”

“Complicated?” Gaara didn’t sound so impressed by his attempt to dodge the situation. “How?”

“We’re from two different villages, you’re the Kazekage!”

Gaara calmly reached down to pick up a small stack of forms, he held them aloft for Lee who reluctantly looked at them. “My status doesn’t affect anything, except maybe makes this transition easier. These are the forms we would need to fill out to change our status with each other and make this public, there is also a change of residency form.”

“Konohagakure is still my home.” Lee countered.

“The residency here is optional.” Gaara said in a clipped tone, setting the papers back down and focusing on Lee with a cool stare.

“This is sudden.”

“It isn’t,” Gaara said, “You’ve been acting this way a long time, and I have had these feelings about you for even longer. I discussed it at length with Naruto.”

“Naruto?” Lee blinked, so people already knew about this? Well, if Naruto knew, surely others did because the loud-mouthed nin could never keep a secret. Lee considered him a very close friend, and he respected him completely; but Naruto’s personality could hardly be overlooked.

“I needed further insight on the subject.”

“What did he have to say?”

“He said, ‘go for it’.” Gaara stated plainly, though the phrase sounded odd coming from him.

“We are both men.” Lee decided to blurt out.

Gaara’s brow quirked up again, quizzical. “I am aware.”

Lee wasn’t sure why he kept trying to put up roadblocks between them but he just felt he should. It felt so confusing, overwhelming, exhilarating. It felt sudden, even if Gaara had been right that the chemistry between them was undeniable, and that they had been getting closer since he had been stationed in Suna, but they had been getting closer even before that too.

“You said it was complicated.” Gaara decided to break the silence, “Why?”

“Well...” Lee faltered, he wanted there to be a reason, because this wasn’t what he thought romance would be. He thought it was sparkling lights, seeing stars, floating on air, butterflies in your stomach. He thought his love interest would be sweet, bubbly, smart and cute. Of course, he never really thought anyone would be attracted to him first, he felt his role as a shinobi was the thing that defined him as a person, but children had dreams. It was why he latched onto Sakura. She had been what he thought love should be, he had tried very hard to get her attention because he felt that had been the next step. Gai had filled his head with poetry, romance, and certain expectations.

Lee had finally focused on Gaara, noticing the details of the Kazekage who was standing patiently there behind his desk for Lee to continue. This man was definitely different than when he had met him as a child. He was calm, collected, aloof, but still had those sharp edges and those insecurities bubbling under the surface. Gaara was broken in a similar way that Lee was, they were both trained killers, and both were motivated by their need to protect others and gain affirmation of their existence. They were distinctly similar, yet so very opposite. Lee embraced his emotions, experienced life full force, and Gaara was reserved and tended to view every emotion others felt as things to analyze and store in specific compartments.

They needed each other as friends often did, but was it more than that?

It was still impossible for him to wrap his head around the notion that the Kazekage, Gaara of the desert, the vessel of Shukaku, was in love with him. Him! An awkwardly limbed, fish-eyed, emotional, shinobi who couldn’t use ninjutsu or genjutsu. Lee was remarkable in a lot of ways, he was a taijutsu master for one, but he wasn’t a genius, a prodigy, or even particularly special

compared to anyone else.

“How did you know?” Lee finally decided to ask.

“It was obvious to me.” Gaara said, “I may not have a point of reference regarding this particular subject, but I know myself well enough to understand a shift in behavior or mood.”

That was very to the point, but what had he expected? A love confession? Gaara to actually discuss at length the emotions he was feeling?

The Kazekage still looked calmly poised, though also a little expectant, as if this conversation had dragged on too long (and it sort of had). Lee still felt jittery, as if someone was going to ambush him at any moment and tell him this was all a joke. There was no point again asking if Gaara was sure, he looked dead serious (as usual), he had been researching this subject, had even asked Naruto and went so far as to contact his clan. Gaara wouldn't do these things unless he felt certain, his day was far too busy for frivolous activities and Lee didn't think the Kazekage understood the notion of 'wasting time'.

“How much time do you need to decide?”

“I don't know.”

Gaara didn't look pleased, “Is there a way to speed up the process?”

“‘The process’?” Lee parroted.

Gaara gestured vaguely, “Is there something we can do for you to work through this?”

Normally people went on dates, or got to know each other better in some way. But, they already had done that, haven't they? Not formally, obviously, but over the course of his stay in Suna they had gotten closer little by little. They had meals together, trained together, went on walks together. Gaara listened when Lee talked about his home village, about his friends, even about things that didn't matter. Gaara had been more reserved, but he had mentioned a few personal memories to Lee and he had cherished the intimacy.

Images of Gaara flashed in his mind; rare smiles, soft green eyes, smooth sand-colored skin, light reflecting brightly atop coarse red hair.

There was something deeper developing between them, he had felt that for a while, it seemed the Kazekage was just the first to notice, and to act on it. But, was he ready for it? Could he trust himself with Gaara's heart? It felt like a hefty responsibility. This couldn't be something fleeting, and it wasn't going to be easy. Lee was not one to back down when things got difficult, but this was territory he had never ventured in. For the first time in a long time he worried about failing, worried about not being what Gaara wanted, or what he really needed.

Could hard work and determination really get them through the rough times if they ended up not being compatible? He thought of Sakura and his misguided affections, all the time and attention he had put into her in his youth only to yield nothing but heartache. That wound had long since closed, once they all had grown up and moved on the thought of her was more a wistful memory than anything else.

While Lee had clearly been caught up in his thoughts Gaara had rounded the desk and took a stance in front of the leaf shinobi, crowding into his space and making it impossible to ignore him. Gaara's brow was furrowed and his eyes were intense, his head tilted slightly up to keep eye contact with the taller man. “I thought I had read you correctly.” He decided to say, lifting a hand

to touch the flat of Lee's chest, his fingers splayed on the stretchy material of Lee's green jumpsuit. "Your heart beats faster when I get close." He said, feeling the thrum of Lee's heart beneath his fingers, "Your skin flushes and your pupils expand." Gaara frowned slightly, "It isn't fear, so it has to be, I thought it was..." He didn't finish what he had meant to say, about to pull his hand away, "I'm not often wrong." The statement may have seemed arrogant from anyone else, but Gaara seemed to just be stating a point.

Before Gaara could retreat Lee had grabbed his wrist, the movement so fast that the resulting slap on his skin was startling enough to rile the sand in the gourd against Gaara's desk but luckily it hadn't sprung forward to save the Kazekage from the casual contact. "I'm not denying that there is something here. I believe I feel something stronger than friendship for you. I just can't define what it is, it's more complicated than just saying yes or no. I don't want to ruin what we have already built by doing something rash." He was normally the first to spring head first into danger, yet this somehow prompted him to feel cautious, wary, actually worried for once.

Gaara hadn't pulled his hand away, letting it stay aloft in Lee's hold, their eyes locked on each other. "I..."

Lee cut in quickly, "I want to be sure." He stared at Gaara who stared right back, tension in the air around them like a static charge. He had lowered his hand, his bandaged fingers still wrapped around Gaara's wrist, keeping the Kazekage captive. "Can I kiss you?" Lee asked with the seriousness of a shinobi about to face death,

Gaara didn't look away, nor did he blush, or fidget, or anything else that Lee would have expected anyone else to do. His green eyes were still hard, so extremely bright in the light of the office, and his lips barely moved when he spoke, "Yes."

Lee didn't dare let Gaara go, and instead brought up his free hand to touch the side of the Kazekage's face, resting there in a purely romantic pose he mimicked from a book he read once. His face was as red as a tomato, Gaara was still coolly staring and Lee was trying to calm his nerves enough to lean in.

He had never kissed anyone before, but he knew what it was supposed to feel like, also knew the basic mechanics of what to do. If he was in love, this was where the fireworks would explode behind his eyelids, and this was where the butterflies would erupt in his stomach. Countless poems of love Gai had shouted from the rooftops rang through his head and he knew this moment would define everything, if there was truly anything between them. It felt like an extremely important moment and Lee didn't know how to proceed, not wanting to ruin it, which kept him from starting it at all.

While Lee was rooted to the spot by nerves Gaara had taken the opportunity to raise up on his tiptoes and press their lips together firmly.

It was about then that Lee's brain shut off completely, his hand snaked from Gaara's cheek to his hair, grabbing gently at the back of his neck as he tilted his head to try and get them more aligned. He couldn't hear anything but his heart and the sound of their breathing, his lips shyly moving against Gaara's, the redhead mimicking his action causing the kiss to be a little uncoordinated but not unpleasant.

Gaara's lips were soft, when Lee felt a little more bold he pressed his tongue inside to taste him for the first time. Lee wasn't sure who made that noise, but someone did, and he felt his stomach flip. The Kazekage didn't taste like sand, or bitterness, or anything else he might've imagined(if he could admit he had imagined this at all); he tasted like summer, like sunlight, something so good and pure and warm.

His bandaged fingers twisted a little harder in Gaara's hair and at some point he let his wrist go in favor of snaking his arm around the Kazekage's lower back, pulling him against him. Gaara's hands had fisted in the fabric at Lee's sides, causing the green fabric to groan under his strong hold, blunt nails almost ripping the stretchy material where they pressed in.

"Relax." Lee found himself saying against the plush of Gaara's mouth, teeth against his lower lip, feeling so much, too much. He didn't know when he had pushed Gaara into the desk, but he had, the Kazekage's back slightly bowed, Lee's hold still firm, their bodies still intimately close. He had been so nervous, so scared before, but this was, this was--

Gaara opened his eyes, just enough to look at him, his green pupils wide, the ring of teal merely a halo. They breathed together, watching each other, Gaara's hold on Lee wasn't as desperate now; his expression wasn't open, but it was definitely not as closed as usual, and those eyes were beautiful, soft and filled with something primal. He wasn't as tense anymore; giving in, just as Lee was.

This was perfect.

He wanted this.

He wanted Gaara.

"Lee." Gaara said his name in a way he had never said it before.

Lee groaned, it was such a lusty, awful, terrible sound but it caused Gaara's eyes to flutter shut and his sharp inhale of breath was enough for him to realize he was affecting the Kazekage just as badly. He couldn't help it when he placed kisses on Gaara's chin, his jaw line, subtly inhaling the scent of his skin and realizing belatedly that he didn't taste sand(but why would he have the barrier on in the safest place in all of Suna?). His hand moved to pop the buttons on Gaara's high collar, bending it down and exposing the line of his neck which the Kazekage gratefully bared to him(seemingly just as eager as Lee).

He pressed his mouth to Gaara's jugular, feeling the pulse under his lips, just as erratic as his own. Gaara felt so human like this, his breathing had hitched, his body was smaller than his, delicate in a way, his skin so smooth and unblemished. It felt surreal, and he couldn't remember why this had been a bad idea, why he had waited so long to act, why he had thought about pushing Gaara away.

Gaara's hands had moved to Lee's back, holding there, because there was no way he could keep holding his sides with Lee so close, and it helped him balance with his body still bent back over his desk.

Lee placed an open mouthed kiss on Gaara's throat, sucking the skin gently, running the flesh under his teeth and exhaling heavily. The red head's body was trembling beneath him, so subtle that Lee only noticed because they were pressed together, but it was beautiful. "Gaara." Lee had mouthed into the skin of his neck before he sucked a little harder.

Pain, bright and uncommon bloomed from the bruise Lee was biting into his neck; it caused the sand in the gourd to rattle and hiss like an agitated snake, the twirl of the cork nearly missed as the sand tried to escape though Gaara was trying to force his control, but Lee kept kissing and biting and the hot wetness of his tongue caused Gaara to openly moan; his attention was aptly taken by the leaf shinobi.

That sound went straight to Lee's groin, the feeling of danger causing his skin to prickle but he didn't pull back, ignoring his survival instincts and just barely aware of the cork as it popped from

the gourd and innocently rolled onto the floor. He was too incensed, wanting Gaara to make that sound again, he had shoved his leg between the Kazekage's thighs, pressing against him, Gaara's fingers twisted in the fabric on his back, pulling at him or maybe just grounding himself.

Lee had already made three hickies, his tongue running over the red marks, Gaara gasped next to his ear.

Suddenly there was a rapping at the door; so loud that Lee had burst away from Gaara in an instant, in a puff of displaced air, his figure reappearing just a few feet away, pivoted away from the door, his attention focused on the wall in front of him to pretend he was looking at the blade mounted on the wall.

Gaara wasn't so quick to recover and when the door burst open, a chuunin standing in the wake of it, the Kazekage was still catching his breath, braced against his desk, a coil of sand having exploded from the gourd due to the startling nature of the interruption.

Said chuunin, a man in his early twenties, with close cropped black hair and clear blue eyes carefully took in the new situation. He felt the immediate charge on the air, his hand still on the handle of the door, and the two guards stationed outside were peering in curiously, hands on their weapons.

His gaze fell to the Kazekage, to the bruises on his neck, to the open collar of his robe, and again towards the sand that swirled threateningly just off to the side of Gaara. The scene was not something he had expected to barge in on, and he didn't know what conclusions to make. It didn't appear that the Kazekage was in pain, or that he was even in danger, but Gaara never showed physical wounds before, and he almost couldn't pull his eyes away from the bright red marks and stupidly didn't make any connection to the leaf ninja off near the ceremonial weaponry.

"Kazekage-sama," He said, transfixed by the brightness of Gaara's eyes and the flush of his skin (the Kazekage was never flushed, hardly showed exertion of any type, and his eyes were never that expressive). "Is everything okay?" Almost as an afterthought he had looked over at Lee who looked suspiciously 'innocent' standing with his back to him, rocking on his heels.

"What do you want?" Gaara had said, in the seconds it took the chuunin to assess the room, he was already recovering, his hands absently buttoning up his collar and willing the sand to sink back into the gourd. The grains attached to the cork willed the small object into the air, hitting the hole in the top of the gourd with a distinct 'plunk' as it stoppered the thing again.

"Um," He hesitated, Gaara's eyes were as sharp as glass again, whatever he had witnessed earlier was gone, like a passing dream, the moment he blinked everything was back to 'normal'. "This came urgently for you, Kazekage-sama, I ran it here from the avery." The guards at the door had turned away again, whatever danger there was had passed, leaving the chuunin to hold his own against the Kazekage. He held out the scroll, still barely in the room that there was no way Gaara could take it from him.

Gaara coolly crossed his arms over his chest in a usual pose, "Bring it here." He would not cross the distance, and the steel in his voice told the chuunin he was not wanted, despite the urgency of his task.

Quickly, he crossed the room, Lee just barely looking over his shoulder to see the sand shinobi hand over the scroll into Gaara's waiting palm. Tatsuo, Lee thought his name was, he had visited the messenger birds a few times since his stay here, but every time he had went was with Gaara, and he hadn't paid too much attention to anyone else that was there. But, the black haired nin looked familiar, at the least he thought his name did start with a 'T'.

“Go.” Gaara dismissed him, and Tatsuo(or whoever he was) bowed awkwardly and left the room almost as quickly as he had came into it.

Once the door shut, the tension fled Lee’s body. He could breathe again, and suddenly everything crashed onto him. What had he done?! He was supposed to be a gentlemen! Had Gai taught him nothing?! He had been a predator, a beast, a fiend!

Gaara had set the scroll on his desk, completely uninterested in it, his green eyes looking across the space at Lee who was turned towards him now, the distance between them unwanted but Gaara didn’t move to close it.

“Gaara, I--” Lee started, feeling the need to apologize, worrying his hormones had got the better of him; but at the same time. Well, he had accomplished his goal. He had seen fireworks alright, the entire show, even the finale. All of it had burst inside of him, he had felt things he had never felt before and suddenly all of Gai’s words about romance and love made perfect sense.

Gaara didn’t let him finish his sentence before he spoke in that same controlled tone, “Well?”

Lee’s brow furrowed just briefly before he realized what Gaara was asking. His answer, he wanted an answer, and he was wondering if Lee had managed to find what he was looking for in their kiss(more than kiss). “If you’ll have me, I would be honored to be your boyfriend.” He said, his face flushing red again, bowing his head to Gaara.

Gaara had walked to Lee in just a few quick strides, silent as death, his hands reaching up to cup Lee’s face to draw him down. He pressed their lips together, savoring the feeling of his soft mouth against his, of his warmth, passion, and life that he found in this newfound intimacy. “Yes.” He said, as if there could be any other answer, this was what he had wanted, for a long time, and when he looked up into Lee’s dark eyes he saw the devotion he had been craving his entire life.

Lee smiled brightly and immediately picked Gaara up in his arms, swinging the Kazekage around like a child; the startled red-head clung to the leaf whirlwind as Lee shouted in jubilation.

This was the happiest day of Lee’s life.

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